

Viktor slicked back his damp hair and flicked out the light in the bath, which was full of steam from the shower. Even after the hot water, he still felt tense and restless. He paused for a few moments in the doorway to the bedroom, to tie the loose pajama bottoms around his waist. He glanced at the clock on the bedside table, which confirmed what he already suspected. It was far too late to be calling her. She was probably asleep, or should be, if she weren't pushing herself too hard and trying to work eighteen hours a day or more. Hermione had a nasty habit of setting herself no reasonable limits when he wasn't there to remind her that there was a whole host of things of interest and import beyond the paperwork on her desk.

He heaved a sigh and looked around the somewhat bare and sterile looking hotel room. Accommodations on the road always seemed to have the same bland lack of personality. The same stock furniture and the same stock linens and the same stock carpets. Viktor padded over to the bed and sank down onto the side, studying the ring on his finger that still felt slightly heavy, strange and new, even after several months. A feeling, just as heavy, settled in on him. He missed her. Viktor shifted toward the middle of the bed and swung his legs up, stretching out on the mattress to study the ceiling.

It shouldn't have been a surprise. They had known it wouldn't be easy, the two of them traveling so much, often with wildly different destinations and schedules, once he started playing again. He had expected separations that lasted too long, worrying while you were away, Floo calls at crazy hours to snatch a bit of conversation or simply to check in, and Apparating like mad to steal just a little bit of time together when the opportunity presented itself. What he hadn't expected was for it to be such a real, physical heaviness, this spending nearly a week apart, by now.

Marriage had granted them the luxury of being together so much during the off season, and he had gotten used to having her right there. Being with her on her trips for Ministry business. Having her to come home to, or being there for her to come home to. This business of going a couple of days without even talking to her was new. And the physical separation was enough to drive you mad, as well. Not that a little separation and the anticipation it bred couldn't be a good thing. A day or two apart tended to make for a few hours in bed that felt more precious than they might have otherwise. But nearly a week? Far too long for a newlywed. That kind of unrelieved tension needed an outlet, and paying back hard fouls twice over when the official wasn't looking only did so much.

Viktor closed his eyes and breathed deep, running a hand down his abdomen, pausing at the waist of the pajama bottoms, then moving farther down, to his groin. He stroked himself through the material, trying to keep his touch light, like Hermione's would be. She was still a little tentative when it came to such things. Still a shade bashful and too shy to be very aggressive. Hermione tended to wait

for him to ask for or initiate anything more intense than kissing. Viktor suspected she was a touch afraid of being rejected, a hint of the old insecurity, the constant bane of those who think too much, peeking through.

His fingertips circled, just barely brushing, soft and light as a butterfly, as he pictured her small hand. Viktor could call up every detail of her body perfectly, including how she kept her nails sensibly short and squared off, but the ink still seeped its way under the edges of her nails anyway, and the way her petite hand fit so perfectly into his own. The way hers were soft except for the hard writing callous on her right hand, where her quill rested when she wrote. The slight hesitation when she touched him, before he responded and she became more certain and sure of herself. The way her skin smelled, usually of clean and simple vanilla, uncomplicated and straightforward. Sometimes, for variety, lavender. Hermione wasn't one for overly fussy perfume. Viktor sucked in his breath as he began to stir. A little more stroking and suddenly the loose pajama bottoms seemed far too confining. He was straining at the fabric, hard and tight, the head surely visible, starting to peek through the foreskin as the erection progressed.

With both hands he plucked the bow at the waist apart, slipping a hand beneath the waistband. He hardened even more when he wrapped his fingers around the shaft, thinking about lifting the mass of Hermione's fall of hair and putting his lips against the hot nape of her neck. She threatened to crop it close now and again out of frustration with it, but he begged her not to. He liked the way her hair refused to be tamed. Viktor liked being able to bury his fingers in the thick curls tumbling between her shoulder blades and the way it brushed against her shoulders and tickled across his skin when she moved over him, framing the shape of her face.

Hermione still didn't think herself particularly beautiful at all. Maybe to most people she wasn't, without the preening and primping and slicking her hair back. Fair enough. Viktor still didn't think himself worthy of a tenth of the squealing female reaction he had encountered in his lifetime, either. Even at her most plain and unadorned, he thought Hermione easily worth more than a hundred of them. There was something open, comfortable and inviting in her face that couldn't be reproduced or rivaled with all the paint, powder and makeup in the world. An intelligence and fire in her brown eyes that he hadn't seen matched anywhere else. And occasionally, just a tiny hint of wide eyed, innocent wonder at putting together the way something worked or experiencing something new, something astonishing. He especially loved seeing that. Viktor would work hard to see that. He had been delighted to discover that Hermione got that look most often when they were making love. As though she hadn't quite gotten over finding out how it felt, or that he took such unabashed, open pleasure in her body.

Viktor usually cupped her face between his hands when they kissed, cradling the

fine line of her jaw and brushing over the full, soft curve of her cheek, stroking back to her hair. He was sure his calloused fingers and palm felt rough against her skin. Her face was heart shaped and broad, and whether she smiled or frowned, there was a deep dimple in her chin when her mouth tightened or tensed. Her lips were full, as well, and they reddened and swelled most fetchingly when she was kissed thoroughly.

Viktor could feel his pulse throbbing beneath his fingers now, as though the blood were pounding through his veins. He sat up and shucked the bottoms off completely, then lay back, closing his eyes once more. He loved to seek out the throbbing pulse point at Hermione's throat, to kiss the thin, delicate skin and keep at it, keep touching her until her heart was hammering just as hard as his. Until it was fluttering beneath his lips like a trapped bird, quick as her breath. To trace the curve of it down, across the hard ridge of her shoulder or collar bone, into the yielding flesh of her breast, pliable and giving beneath his fingers and mouth.

Hermione's chest, like the rest of her figure, was made up of plump, soft curves, malleable and well padded, the cleft between her breasts narrow and full of heat, just the slightest bit musky and salty to the taste. They felt a curious combination of supple and firm as he kneaded them beneath his palms and teased the pale pink nipples with his fingertips until they hardened and flushed a darker rose that matched her lips. Darker still when he suckled them, lips and tongue wet and hot against soft, responsive tissue. Viktor worked at his shaft with long, slow, languorous strokes, from base to foreskin, his free hand clutching at the bedsheets as his breath quickened.

The curve of her hip and belly contrasted much the same way as her collarbones and breasts. An unyielding ridge of solid bone tucked in and sloping off next to a gentle, tender curve that gave slightly under the touch. The mound of her belly sat prominently between her hips, the navel deep and tilted upward slightly. Hermione had been self conscious of it at first, thinking it made her look overly plump rather than ripe and fertile. He reveled in her softness, the way one sinuous line flowed smoothly into the next. Shoulder to breast, waist to hip, small of the back to buttocks, thigh to knee, calf to ankle to heel.

It seemed so different from his own body. By comparison he was all hardness, unpadded bone and solid, sharp edges, a concave abdomen surrounded by prominent hipbones. Sheer planes meeting each other at harsh angles. Dark, hooded eyes set above razor sharp cheekbones. She was composed of lithe bows, bends and arches that called out to be touched. Stroked and traced from one to the other, like a graceful topography free of harsh transitions. Dozens of hills and valleys to outline with a hand, to kiss, to taste, to touch. All roads always leading back to the very core of her, that secretive hollow at the juncture of her thighs, partially hidden by a dark, wild thatch of hair. Viktor let out a low moan

and slowed his strokes even more, trying to draw the experience out as much as possible.

On the away stroke, as he moved his hand away from his body, he began trailing a fingertip along the ridge on the underside of the shaft, the frenulum at the base of his foreskin, and the foreskin itself. The loose skin provided both lubrication and friction, adding to the already intense sensation. Viktor thought about the velvety folds between her legs, the way her body usually trembled when he smoothed a hand through the coarse curls and pressed a moistened fingertip gently into the warmth, parting her, to seek out the nub of her clitoris, to tease and pleasure. The way her thigh muscles loosened, falling away to grant him access, then tensing as waves of sensation coursed through her.

When Hermione became sufficiently aroused, her skin flushed, she felt slick beneath his fingers and hot to the touch. Then Viktor would slip his fingers inside the grasping, wet tunnel, deep inside, thrusting and filling. Usually by then he was more than eager to fill her with more than his fingers, but he tried to hold off until the feeling was so intense that it was impossible to delay it any longer. The point where he felt near to bursting, as though he had to bury his erection deep inside her or go mad with the desire to couple with her. The desire to get as close as you could possibly manage, close as your skin would allow, two bodies mingling and nearly melding into one, working in concert toward the same goal. Striving together out of love, lust, pleasure, want and need.

The feeling of penetrating Hermione couldn't possibly be compared to anything else. It was merely poor, pale imitation to cup his hand tightly over the exposed head, to curl his fingers tightly around himself, moving the foreskin as he stroked downward. It was pleasurable, but still nothing when compared to actually slipping into the close, wet warmth of her, to feeling the resistance and grasping welcome the muscles offered. Nothing compared to hearing the quiet, mewling sounds of pleasure in his ear, sprinkled among her panting breaths and murmured encouragement and pleading. Even better were the times when all the sounds stopped, as she held her breath for an instant and her body jerked in the spasm of release beneath him and around him. Usually followed by an explosion of breath and strangled cries, the panting increasingly ragged as she surrendered to the mounting sensation.

The sight and feel of her beneath him, arching, striving, sweating, head thrown back, skin flushed, it moved him to work that much harder, to drive her on to more. Always more, as much as he could give her. Putting his mind on Hermione's pleasure helped Viktor to focus on something other than his own desperate need for release. Something other than the need to thrust over and over again, to drive his hips and pelvis forward to meet hers, at least for a little while. Until the blood was pounding in his own ears, his own breathing sounding harsh and ragged there, the pressure and tension building in the core of him,

finally demanding and commanding his attention completely. Until he had to give voice to it, words tumbling out amid the moans. Hermione had been somewhat surprised and amused to discover how vocal he became.

Viktor's free hand twisted in the sheet, clutching for purchase as need for release, pleasurable sensation, became something else entirely, vicious and all-consuming as hunger or fear, but something so primal and raw that it defied naming. The feeling curled through his groin, spread through his pelvis, then blossomed into the depths of his belly. He squeezed gently with his fingers, near the base, trying to balance for just a few precious seconds longer on that razor thin edge between need for relief and relief. The images of Hermione, the memory of her smell, touch, taste and feel, they flashed behind his closed eyelids and crashed through his thoughts. And then pushed him over the edge. Viktor cried out her name over and over in a strangled voice as the sensation roared through him, radiating like shockwaves through bone and muscle and nerve, like heat blooming in the very core of him and washing over him. His body tensed and it was as though fireworks were exploding on the other side of his eyelids. Or inside him. The legs in his muscles tensed and jerked involuntarily as he spilled.

Viktor rested his hand below his ribcage again, the skin moist with perspiration beneath his palm and fingers, the massive flush of heat subsiding, leaving him feeling slightly damp and wrung out, his muscles pleasantly loose and warm, his breathing still loud in his ears. He hung in that dim, hazy place that was not quite wakefulness, not quite sleep for a few moments, and wondered for an instant if he weren't simply dreaming her voice. "That's not quite fair. I come all this way, only to find you've started without me."

He turned his head toward the doorway, where Hermione stood, the small overnight bag she carried on short trips at her feet, shaking her head and looking mildly amused. He propped himself up on one elbow, lazily. "How did you get here? And how long haff you been standing there?"

"Took a bit of my time off to come meet you. I didn't think I could stand another two whole days. I tried calling you earlier to tell you I was coming, but you were still at the stadium. And the desk manager missed you when you came in. They gave me an extra key to the room," Hermione said, coming over and sitting on the edge of the bed. "And I've been standing there all of a minute."

"I simply must talk to the manager about the lax security, then," he said with a smile, tracing a fingertip up her arm, over her shoulder and up her neck, beneath her hair. "Just letting vomen into my room. During private time."

"I wouldn't, if I were you. They did everything but strip search me to verify my identity. I've spent more than an hour downstairs with the manager, trying to

sweet talk my way up here,” Hermione said, closing her eyes and rolling her head back.

“Maybe someone should do that, then. Strip search you, I mean,” Viktor suggested, slipping his arm around her waist. “Someone familiar with what my spouse looks like naked. Very,” he added, peeling up the back of her shirt with the other hand, so he could roll over and kiss the small of her back, “familiar. So familiar, they can close their eyes and recall every detail, every inch. When they cannot have the real thing and are missing it something fierce.”

Hermione laughed, deep in her throat, the sound rich and muffled. “And who would be conducting this strip search?”

“Someone... well acquainted. Intimately, even,” Viktor replied, skimming one hand up to cup her breast. He felt the nipple harden beneath his palm.

Hermione turned and stretched out, lying on the bed in the space next to him. Her voice was barely above a whisper. “I would ask if you missed me, but I think the answer is pretty bloody obvious. Maybe I could join in next time? If there is a next time this evening? That is, if you’re not too tired.”

Viktor interrupted by touching his fingers to her lips. She looked startled for a split second. “Ask anyway,” he told her.

Hermione looked at him searchingly, her brown eyes curious, sweeping back and forth over his inscrutable face several times before she asked, slightly timid and halting, “Did you miss me?”

He nodded, slipped his hands upward to cup her face, then tilted his head forward, touching his forehead gently to hers. “Like... air...” he said, his breathing still a little fast. She could feel the way his hair and face were damp with perspiration. For an instant she wanted to question him, to pin down his meaning, to combine logic with sentiment. Air, like breath, or air as in flying? The question was almost out of her mouth before she decided it didn’t matter. With Viktor, they were nearly the same thing. Both necessities. Instead of forming the words, her lips formed a soft, shy and uncertain smile, the dimple in her chin appearing. He tilted her face slightly, and kissed her mouth, then traced a finger over her jawline while returning the smile. “Like air,” he repeated.